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THE FACE OF THE NIGHT

a

By the Same Author
POEMS FOR PICTURES

LONDON: JOHN MACQUEEN
49 RUPERT STREET, W.

**THE LIFE OF MADOX
BROWN**
THE CINQUE PORTS
D. G. ROSSETTI:
A CRITICAL MONOGRAPH

In Collaboration with
Joseph Conrad

THE INHERITORS
ROMANCE: A NOVEL

The Face of the Night

A SECOND SERIES OF
POEMS FOR PICTURES

Ford M. Hueffer
BY
FORD M. HUEFFER



LONDON
JOHN MACQUEEN
49 RUPERT STREET, W.
1904

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The Face of the Night

A Pastoral

"The men of Gnosso have a legend that a man lying all night in the marshes near that town may see a face looking down upon him out of the sky. Such a man shall ever after be consumed with a longing to see again that face. In pursuit of it he shall abandon his home, his flocks and his duty to the State. And such men are accounted blasphemers because they infect others with this fever and are harmful to the republic."

[A wide, stony plain, the bed of a river, but dry and brown because it is the heart of summer. Towards sunset. In the distance against the sky there rise the columns of a deserted temple and of poplar trees with, at their bases, a tangle of rosebushes and of underwood among fallen stones. To the right, far off, is a rocky bluff, purple against the evening: at its foot, very clear and small, are large fallen rocks round a green pool and spreading and shadowy trees. Small fires glimmer here. To the left the plain opens out towards the horizon, wide, suave and level; at the verge is a shimmer of the broad curve of the river.]

In the foreground a young man lies upon

The Face of the Night

two fleeces. A fillet has fallen from his hair, his limbs are a golden brown, he has a leopard skin about his loins. His hands are clasped behind his head, he looks up into the western sky, his eyes searching for the first planet to shine. Over the plain from the sunset and from the sheepfolds in the shadow of the bluff, young girls and shepherds come towards him in knots. Some play upon pipes, others cry out from band to band, a horn sounds faintly with a guttural intonation. A dog's bark winds sharply from a distance, and there is a continual drone of gnats in the still air.

The Young Man (listlessly).

I have seen the Night with her hair
 gemm'd with stars,
With her smile the Milky Way, and her
 locks the darker bars
Of the Heavens. . . .

The Shepherds and the Young Girls.

Oh, come away,
For Lalagé is thine.

He.

With her pale face of stars
I have seen her.

They.

Rise! The shine
Of the owl-light's on the pools,

The Face of the Night

And the hinds bring skins of wine,
And the hot day cools
To its close.

[The drone of the pipes and the quivering of strings still sound as others come across the plain. They come closer, and, standing round, obscure the sky from him.]

He (rising on one elbow).

Ah ! still your pipes, still the
cyther string that jars,
For I have seen the Night with her face of
stars.

The Men.

Rise up and quit these places, for in shadows
Lalagé
Doth await thee.

The Girls.

Quit your fleeces, for in the
shadows we
In the light of nuptial torches where the
poplars bar the sky,
Thro' the rocks around the pool, thro' the
hyacinths shall. . . .

He.

I, I,
I have seen, have seen. . . .

An Old Man (hastening upon them).

Why never,
Quit these places full of fever.

The Face of the Night

He.

I did see a face look downwards
Thro' the stars.

Old Man.

No, never, never.

He.

I did see. . . .

Old Man (seeking to drown his voice).

Mists from the river.

A Young Girl's voice (she sings as she comes along).

When he comes from seawards,
When he comes from townwards,
My love sings to me words
That my heart likes well.

The Men (to him).

We will bear thee on our shoulders
Through the covert-sides and boulders
With thy fleeces for a litter.

The Girls.

Unto where the watch-fires glitter
On our shoulders we will bear thee
To where Lalagé shall rear thee
'Twixt her breasts.

The Face of the Night

He.

A face looked downwards,
And I thirst, I thirst, am thirsting.

The Old Man (in a threatening whisper).

Close thy lips on this for ever.
This is blasphemy. 'Twould sever
Life and love and earth from gladness.
Close thy lips. I know this madness.
I am ancient.

He.

I am thirsting.

A Young Man.

Thy Lalagé's eyes are pools of rest,
Thy Lalagé's lips are sweet warm grapes
I would it were mine to taste and taste.

A Young Girl.

And thy Lalagé's heart is bursting.

The Young Man.

I would it were mine to sink and sink
Between her breasts like hills of wine.
I would it were mine
Her lips to taste,
And to clasp her hips and to clasp her
waist,
And to drink her breath and to be the first
To . . .

The Face of the Night

He.

Thirst. I thirst.

Two Girls (with horns slung from their shoulders).

Here is milk. Here wine.

He.

Begone and send me that wind to drink
That cools its flood on the glacier's brink,
Send me that wind.

The Old Man (persuasively).

Thy Lalagé's grown kind:
Sighs fill the air near her, and from her eyes,
Where low she lies upon the filmy fleeces,
Bright tears down fall into the milk-white
 creases,
And warm, dark valleys of her snowy kirtle.
And loosely tied her girdle. . . .

A Hind (running in on them).

Thy white ewe hath burst her hurdle,
Thy grey bitch hath tree'd a leopard,
Shepherd, shepherd,
Thy black heifer's milk doth curdle.

*He (with a weary and passionate gesture
of disgust).*

I am sick of sheep and shepherds.

The Men.

Thou hast led us in the wars !

The Face of the Night

The Girls.

And the fairest of us maidens opens out to
you her arms.
Round her feet the grasses whisper, round
her head the firefly swarms
Form a beacon, you shall harbour in her
soft, warm arms.

He.

I did see a face with for hair the darker bars
Of the heavens. . . .

The Girls (seeking to drown his voice).

We'll go dancing where
the torchlights meet
With the lances of the starlight and the grove
is shadowiest,
Showing here a foam-white shoulder, white
waved arm and red lit breast,
As the harebells brush our ankles till our
loves caress our feet,
Burnt-out torches, rustling silence, and the
night wind faint and sweet.

He (turning upon his elbow towards the men).

I shall lead you with your lances when you
face the men of Hather?
I must voice you in the counsels of the aged
king, my father?
I shall lead the ships to seawards, I must
guard the flocks from townwards?

The Face of the Night

(To the Girls.)

I must bed your fairest maidens that the rest
may dance in cadence?
So that wine may flow in plenty, so your
loves and you content ye,
Whilst with chitons loose on shoulders in
the twilight of the boulders
And in secret dells. . . .

Ye wantons! I have seen
a face look downwards,
Pure and passionless and distant where with
stars the pure sky teemeth.

The Old Man

He blasphemeth, he blasphemeth.

He.

I am sick of vine-wreathed barrels,
Sick of lances, arrows, quarrels,
Sick of tracking in the dew,
Of their limbs, and breasts, and you. . .
I have seen that face of faces,
I have thought the utter thought.

[He rises to his feet.

I go to seek in desert places.

*[Whilst he speaks the men heave up
stones to throw at him. The girls
shake their hands and cry out. He
silences them, shaking his fist. The
OLD MAN runs about behind
whispering to one and another.*

The Face of the Night

(To the Girls.)

All your sun-tanned arms are nought,
All their lances and your dances,
Nought and nought. . . . And I must
wander

Past the mountains of Iskander,
Past the salt-glazed lakes of Meině,
Past Pahán mist-veiled and rainy,
Whither? Whither? Ah, my Fortune?
Seeking her I must importune
All the icy ghosts of souls
That died of frost, and all the ghouls
That feed in battle-clouds,
The fiery spirits in the shrouds
Above volcanoes and the spirits of the dawn
That sing in choirs. And where the caverns
yawn
Which let out sleep, and death, and shame,
and leprosy
Upon this earth, you may find trace of me
But here no more.

The Old Man.

Blasphemy! Blasphemy!
He doth condemn this godlike life of ours.

The Girls.

Blasphemy! Blasphemy!
He doth condemn our warm, sweet mid-
night hours.

The Face of the Night

He (moving away from the plain).

I must go seek her on the icy rocks,
Frost in my blood or flame about my head,
Calling and calling where the echo mocks,
Crying in the midnights where the ocean
moans

White in the darkness. . . .

*[A man casts a great stone that strikes
him on the shoulder. He falls on
to one knee.*

Fool, though I be dead
All here is nothing, but in her fair places
My shade shall find her wisdom.

The Girls.

Stones ! Cast stones !

*[A shower of stones strikes him down.
He cries from the ground.*

All here is nothing. Whilst each mountain
traces

Shadows half-circling from every worthless
dawn,

My shade shall trace her to her twilight
portal,

Then, on a hill-top, on a shadowy lawn,
Plain in the dew her footsteps !

*The Old Man (striking a lance through his
side).*

Dead !

The Face of the Night

He (gasping).

Immortal
Goddess ! Wisdom ! Face o' Night ! Be-
yond the twilight bars. . . .

[He dies.

*The Old Man (striking the spear through
him again).*

Cast stones !

The Girls (to the men).

Cast stones !

*[They gather stones in their skirts and
drop them in a great number on to
the body, until it has the resem-
blance of a cairn. Whilst they
hurry about the Old Man speaks
to any that will listen to him.*

For that this was a Prince raise him a
tomb,

Casting your stones on it. In sun nor
gloom

Come never here again. . . . Here shall be
moans

And whisperings of blasphemy to hear were
doom. . .

Cast there, stones there, above his lips that
lied.

So be his name forgotten. . . . Never a word
From henceforth of his dying. This true
lance



The Face of the Night

That slew him shall be burnt. . . . Never
a word,
Never a word of him again. . . . But dance,
Choose a new mate for Lalage's soft side
This night. Yes there, above his lips that
lied.

[They begin to disperse.]

A Young Girl.

I would he had kissed me ere he died.

The Old Man (shaking his head misgivingly, to another old man).

You heard?

[They all go away over the plain in groups of two and three; the poplars and the ruined temple have disappeared into the last light: the white garments have blue and purple shadows and the evening star shakes out brilliant rays in the dusky sky.]

The voice of a Young Girl (singing in the distance).

When he comes from seawards,
When he comes from townwards,
My love sings to me words
That my heart likes well.

The Face of the Night

[The night wind sweeps down; the watch-fires at the foot of the hills spring up as if they had been replenished and waver along the wind. It reaches the cairn of stones and runs with a sifting sound among the dry grasses around. It continues through the night.]

A Sequence

I

YOU make me think of lavender,
And that is why I love you so :
Your sloping shoulders, heavy hair,
And long swan's neck like snow,
Befit those gracious girls of long ago,
Who in closed gardens took the quiet air ;
Who lived the ordered life to gently pass
From earth as from rose petals perfumes
go,
Or shadows from that dial in the grass ;
Whose fingers from the painted spinet
keys
Drew small heart-clutching melodies.

A Sequence

II

I DO not ask so much,
—Oh, bright-hued ; oh, tender-eyed—
As you should sometimes shimmer at my
side,
Oh, Fair.

I do not crave a touch,
Nor, at your comings hither,
Sound of soft laughter, savour of your hair,
Sight of your face ; oh fair, oh full of grace,
I ask not, I.

But that you do not die,
Nor fade, oh bright, nor wither,
That somewhere in the world your sweet,
dim face
Be, unattainable, unpaled by fears,
Unvisited by years,
Stained by no tears.

A Sequence

III

COME in the delicate stillness of dawn,
Your eyelids heavy with sleep ;
When the faint moon slips to its line—
dim-drawn,
Grey and a shadow, the sea. And deep,
very deep,
The tremulous stillness ere day in the
dawn.

Come, scarce stirring the dew on the lawn,
Your face still shadowed by dreams ;
When the world's all shadow, and rabbit
and fawn—
Those timorous creatures of shadows and
gleams,
And twilight and dewlight, still people the
lawn.

Come, more real than life is real,
Your form half seen in the dawn ;
A warmth half felt, like the rays that steal
Hardly revealed from the East ; oh warmth
of my breast,

A Sequence

Oh life of my heart, oh intimate solace of
me . . .
So, when the landward breeze winds up
from the quickening sea,
And the leaves quiver of a sudden and life
is here and the day,
You shall fade away and pass
As—when we breathed upon your mirror's
glass—
Our faces died away.

A Sequence

IV

IF we could have remembrance now
And see, as in the winter's snow
We shall, what's golden in these hours,
The flitting, swift, intangible desires of sea
and strand !

Who sees what's golden where we stand ?
The sky's too bright, the sapphire sea too
green ;

I, I am fevered, you cold-sweet, serene,
And . . . and . . .

Yet looking back in days of snow
Unto this olden day that's now,
We'll see all golden in these hours
This memory of ours.

A Sequence

V

IT was the Autumn season of the year
When ev'ry little bird doth ask his mate :
" I wonder if the Spring will find us here,
It groweth late."

I saw two Lovers walking through the
 grass,
And the sad He unto his weeping Dear
Did say, " Alas !
When Spring comes round I shall no
 more be here,
For I must sail across the weary sea
And leave the waves a-churn 'twixt you
 and me.

" Oh, blessed Autumn ! blest late Autumn-
 tide !
For ever with thy mists us Lovers hide.
Ignore Time's laws
And leave thy scarlet haws
For ever on the dewy-dripping shaws
Of this hillside.
Until the last, despite of Time and Tide,

A Sequence

Give leave that we may wander in thy
 mist,
With the last, dread
Word left for aye unsaid
And the last kiss unkisst."

*It was the Autumn season of the year,
When ev'ry little bird doth ask his mate :
"I wonder if the Spring will find us here,
It groweth late."*

A Sequence

VI

WHEN all the little hills are hid in snow,
And all the small brown birds by frost are
 slain,
And sad and slow the silly sheep do go
All seeking shelter to and fro ;
 Come once again
To these familiar, silent, misty lands ;
 Unlatch the lockless door
 And cross the drifted floor ;
Ignite the waiting, ever-willing brands,
 And warm thy frozen hands
 By the old flame once more.
Ah, heart's desire, once more by the old
 fire stretch out thy hands.

The Great View

UP here, where the air's very clear,
And the hills slope away nigh down to the
bay,

It is very like Heaven. . . .

For the sea's wine-purple and lies half
asleep

In the sickle of the shore, and serene in the
west,

Lion-like, purple and brooding in the even,
Low hills lure the sun to rest.

Very like Heaven. . . . For the vast marsh
dozes,

And waving plough-lands and willowy
closes

Creep and creep up the soft south steep.

In the pallid North the grey and ghostly
downs do fold away.

And, spinning spider-threadlets down the
sea, the sea-lights dance

And shake out their wavering radiance.

Very like Heaven. . . . For, a shimmering
of pink,

East, far east, past the sea-lights' distant
blink,

Sidera Cadentia

(ON THE DEATH OF QUEEN VICTORIA)

WHEN one of the old, little stars doth fall
from its place,

 The eye,
Glimpsing aloft must sadden to see that its
space

 In the sky
Is darker, lacking a spot of its ancient,
shimmering grace,
And sadder, a little, for loss of the glimmer
on high.

Very remote, a glitter, a mote far away, is
your star,

But its glint being gone from the place
where it shone

The night's somewhat grimmer and some-
thing is gone

Out of the comforting quiet of things as
they are.

 A shock,
A change in the beat of the clock ;
And the ultimate change that we fear feels
a little less far.

Night Piece

AH, of those better tides of dark and
melancholy—
When one's abroad, in a field—the night
very deep, very holy ;
The turf very sodden a-foot, walking heavy
—the small ring of light,
O' the lanthorn one carries, a-swinging to
left and to right,
Revealing a flicker of hedgerow, a flicker
of rushes—and Night
Ev'rywhere ; ev'rywhere sleep and a hush-
ing to sleep—
I know that I never shall utter the utter-
most secrets aright,
They lie so deep.

Thanks whilst Unharnessing

I

(He gets down from the cart.)

WESTRING the last of silver light doth
gleam,

Whilst in the welling shimmer of the lamp
From the tired horse the blanketing of
steam

Flickers and whirls aloft into the damp
Sharp winter darkness. In the deadened
air

The long, still night doth settle everywhere.
And hark! there comes the rapt, sweet,
crooning snatches

Of song from where the little robin watches
Close in the thorn, beyond the ring of
light.

II

(He speaks towards the bushes.)

Softest of all the birds that sing at night,

For the most mellowest sound,

That the long year brings round,

Sweet robin, I give thanks and love you
best

Of birds that nest.

Thanks

(He follows the horse in, humming.)

Sing ! it is well, though the rest of life be
bitter,

Sing ! *(I swill the oats in the trough and
loose the girth.)*

Warble ! It is well. *(There's a rustle in
the litter :*

That's the old grey rat.) It is well upon
the earth.

III

Cloht-up and snug and warm, a-munching
oats

Old Tom doth make a comfortable sound,
A rhythmic symphony for your sweet notes.

(He speaks from the stable door.)

Small brother, flit in here, since all around
The frost hath gripped the ground ;
And oh ! I would not like to have you die.
We's help each other
Little Brother Beady-eye.

(The Robin flits in.)

There—*Sing!* Warm and mellow the
lanthorn lights the stable.

Little brother, sing! In-a-doors beside
the hearth.

Slippers are a-toast, and the tea's upon the
table.

*Robin when you sing it is well upon the
earth.*

*(He closes the stable door and enters the
cottage.)*

Grey Matter

She. They leave us nothing.

He. Still, a little's left.

She. A crabbèd, ancient, dried biologist,
Somewhere very far from the sea, closed
up from the sky,
Shut in from the leaves, destroys our hopes
and us.

He. Why, no, our hopes and . . .

She. In his "Erster Heft,"
Page something, I forget the line, he says
That, hidden as deep in the brain as he
himself from hope,
There's this grey matter.

He. Why, 'tis there, dear heart.

She. That, if that hidden matter cools,
decays,
Dies—what you will—our souls die out as
well ;

Since, hidden in the millionth of a cell,
Is all we have to give us consciousness.

He. Suppose it true.

She. Ah, never ; better die,
Better have never lived than face this mist,
Better have never toiled to such distress.

Grey Matter

He. It matters little.

She. Little !—Where shall I,
The woman, where shall you take part,
My poet? Where has either of us scope
In this dead-dawning century that lacks all
faith,

All hope, all aim, and all the mystery
That comforteth. Since he victorious
With his cold vapours chills out you and me,
The woman and the poet?

He. Never, dear.

For you and I remain,
The woman and the poet. And soft rain
Still falls and still the crocus flames,
The blackbird calls.

She. But half the sweet is gone.
The voices of our children at their games
Lack half their ring.

He. Why, never, dear. Out there,
The sea's a cord of silver, still to south
Beyond the marsh

She. Ah, but beyond it all,
And all beneath and all above, half of the
glory's done.

And I and you. . . .

He. Why, no. The ancient sun
Shines as it ever shone, and still your
mouth

Is sweet as of old it was.

She. But what remains?

He. All the old pains,
And all the old sweet pleasures and the
mystery

Grey Matter

Of time, slow travel and unfathomed deep.

She. And then this cold extinction? . . .

He. Dreamless sleep.

She. And nothing matters?

He. All the old, old things.

Whether to Church or College
rings

The clamorous bell of creeds,

We, in the lush, far meads,

Poet and woman, past the city walls,

Hear turn by turn the burden of their calls,

Believe what we believe, feel what we feel,

Like what we list of what they cry within

Cathedral or laborat'ry,

Since, by the revolution of the wheel,

The one swings under, let us wait content.

She. Yet it is hard.

He. Ah, no. A sure intent,

For me and you.

The right, true, joyful word, the sweet, true
phrase,

The calling of our children from the woods
these garden days

Remain.—These drops of rain have laid
the dust

And in our soft brown seed-beds formed
the crust

We needed for our sowings. Bring your
seed,

And you shall prick it in, I close the row.

Be sure the little grains your hands have
pressed

Tenderly, lovingly, home, shall flourish best.

Grey Matter

She. Aye, you are still my poet.

He.

Even so

Betwixt the rain and shine. Half true's
still true

More truly than the thing that's proved
and dead.

The sun lends flame to every crocus head
Once more, and we once more must sow
and weed

Since in the earth the newly stirring seed
Begins the ancient mystery anew.

Old Man's Even Song

Tis but a teeny mite
Hard, road side edge,
Ol' missus' candle light
Shines through thet broken hedge.

Reach me my coät, lads,
Give me a lift into it,
Rowin' they tater-clads
Tasks me to do it
Terribly ;
Time was when I weer mad
Diggin' by star's light,
Now I am mortal glad
T' reach my dure-ajar's light,
'N' eat my tea.

Reach me my toöls, boys,
Ah mun quit this talk 'n' lurry;
Theer's my ol' missus' voice
Calls : "Ol' meastur, hurry,
Y'r tea-time's come."
Smells from the chimney side
Sniff down this plaguy mist,
Wanst I'd wander far an' wide,
Now I'm terr'ble stiff an' whist
'N' stay at home.

Old Man's Even Song

'Tis but a yeard or two
Hard road, thank God.
Then off the hard an' goo
Home on the sod.

Children's Song

SOMETIMES wind and sometimes rain,
Then the sun comes back again;
Sometimes rain and sometimes snow,
Goodness, how we'd like to know
Why the weather alters so.

When the weather's really good
We go nutting in the wood;
When it rains we stay at home,
And then sometimes other some
Of the neighbours' children come.

Sometimes we have jam and meat,
All the things we like to eat;
Sometimes we make do with bread
And potatoes boiled instead.
Once when we were put to bed
We had nowt and mother cried,
But that was after father died.

So, sometimes wind and sometimes rain,
Then the sun comes back again;
Sometimes rain and sometimes snow,
Goodness, how we'd like to know
If things will *always* alter so.

From the Soil

(TWO MONOLOGUES)

I

The Field Labourer speaks.

AH am a mighty simple man and only
Good wi' my baggin' hook and sichlike and
'tis lonely
Wheer Ah do hedge on Farmer Finn his
farm.

Often Ah gits to thinking
When it grows dark and the ol' sun's done
sinking,
And Ah hev had my sheere
Of fear
And wanted to feel sure that God were near
And goodly warm—
As near as th'eldritch shave I were at wark
about . . .

Plenty o' time for thinking
We hes between the getting up and sinking
Of that ol' sun—about the God we tark
about . . .

In the beginning God made Heaven and
The 'Arth, 'n Sea we sometimes hear a-
calling

From the Soil

When wind she bloweth from the rainy land
An' says ther'll soon be wet an' rain
a-falling.

Ah'll give you, parson, God He made the sea,
An' made this 'Arth, ner yit Ah wo-an't
scrimmage

But what He made the sky; what passes *me*
Is that what follows: "Then the Lord made
we

In His own image."

For, let alone the difference in us creatures,
Some short o' words like me, and others
preachers

With stores of them, like you ; some fair,
some middlin',

Some black-avis'd like you and good at
fiddlin',

Some crabb'd, some mad, some mighty gay
and pleasant,

No two that's more alike than jackdaw is
to pheasant,

We're poorish stuff at best.

We doesn't last no time before we die,
Nor leave more truck behind than they
poor thrushes.

You find, stiff feathers, laid aside the bushes
After a hard ol' frost in Janu-ry.

Ol' crow he lives much longer,

Ol' mare's a de-al stronger

'N the hare's faster . . .

If so be God's like we and we like He
The man's as good's his Master.

From the Soil

You are a civil, decent-spoken man, Muss
Parson.

'N' I don't think ye'll say this kind o' tark
is worse'n arson—

That's burning stacks, I think—surely it
isn' meant so,

I tell you, Parson, no ;

'N' us poor folk we doesn't want to blame
You parsons fer the things that's said and
sung

Up there in church. My apple tree is
crook'd because 'twere bent so

When it were young.

'N' them as had you preacher-folk to
tame,

Taught you the tales that you are bound to
tell

Us folk below

About three Gods that's one an' Heav'n an
Hell,

An' things us folk ain't *meant* to under-
stand.

I tell you, sir, we men that's on the land
Needs summut we can chew when trouble's
brewing,

When our ol' 'ooman's bad an' rent is due
'N' we no farden,

'N' when it's late to sow 'n' still too wet to
dig the garden,

Something as we can chew like that ol' cow
be chewing.

Something told plain and something we
gits holt on,

From the Soil

—You need a simple sort o' feed to raise a
colt on—

We needs it, parson, life's a bitter scrim-
mage,

Livin' and stuggin' in the mud and things
we do

Enow confound us ;

We hain't no need for fear

Of God, to make the living hardly
worth . . .

You tell us, sir, that "God He made this
Earth

In His own image"

An' make the Lord seem near.

So's we could think that when we come to
die

We'll lie

In this same goodly 'Arth, an' things goo
on around us

Much as they used to goo.

II

The Small Farmer soliloquises.

I wonder why we toiled upon the earth

From sunrise until sunset, dug and delved,
Crook-backed, cramp-fingered, making
little marks

On the unmoving bosoms of the hills,

And nothing came of it. And other men

In the same places dug and delved and
ended

From the Soil

As we have done ; and other men just
there
Shall do the self-same things until the end.
I wonder why we did it. . . . Underneath
The grass that fed my sheep, I often
thought
Something lay hidden, some sinister thing
Lay looking up at us as if it looked
Upwards thro' quiet waters ; that it saw
Us futile toilers scratching little lines
And doing nothing. And maybe it smiled
Because it knew that we must come to
this. . . .

I lay and heard the rain upon the roof
All night when rain spelt ruin, lay and
heard
The east wind shake the windows when that
wind
Meant parched up land, dried herbage,
blighted wheat,
And ruin, always ruin creeping near
In the long droughts and bitter frosts and
floods.
And when at dawning I went out-a-doors
I used to see the top of the tall shaft
O' the workhouse here, peep just above the
downs,
It was as if the thing were spying, waiting,
Watching my movements, saying, "You
will come,
Will come at last to me." And I am
here . . .

From the Soil

And down below that Thing lay there and
smiled ;

Or no, it did not smile ; it was as if
One might have caught it smiling, but one
saw

The earth immovable, the unmoved sheep
And senseless hedges run like little strings
All over hill and dale. . . .

"The Mother"

A SONG-DRAMA.

Characters.

THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE.

THE MOTHER.

THE LITTLE BLADES OF GRASS.

THE LITTLE GRAINS OF SAND AND OF
DUST.

SCENE.—*Just outside a great city. Battalions of staring, dun-coloured, brick houses, newly finished, with vacant windows, bluish slate roofs and yellow chimney pots, march on the fields which are blackened and shrouded with fog. Innumerable lines of railway disappear among them, gleaming in parallel curves. Fog signals sound and three trains pass on different levels; the lights in their windows an orange blur. A continuous hooting of railway engines. THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE, leaning on the brick parapet of the upper embankment, speaks towards THE MOTHER, who is unseen in the fog above the fields.*

The Spirit of the Age.

It's I have conquered you
It is over and done with your green and
over and done with your blue.

[REDACTED]

" *The Mother* "

Conquered you. Where is your sky ?
Where is the green that your gown had
of late ?

The Mother.

Wait.

The Spirit of the Age.

I have trampled you down, you must die.
It is only begun
Yet it's over and done
With the green of your grass and the blue
of your sky.
Even your great constellations
Blaze vainly, are hid by the dun
Of the smoke of my fires. . . .

The Mother.

I wait ; I have patience.

The Spirit of the Age.

The smoke of my fires,
The dun of the lives and desires
Of the millions and millions who live
And who strive.
Only to trample you down, blot you out,
foul your face and forget.

The Mother.

Ah, and yet.

[*The fog to the north lifts a little and
discloses clouds of smoke like a pall
above a forest of chimney stacks; a
square Board School playground where*

" The Mother "

*children are running through puddles
on the wet asphalt.*

The Spirit of the Age.

And behold, they are toiling and moiling
And soiling
Your winds and your rains ; yea, and
hark to the noise
Of the girls and the boys
Of untold generations.

The Mother.

I wait. I have patience.

The Spirit of the Age.

They play in the waters
I grant them, the daughters
Of fog-dripped smut-showers.
Would they thank you for flowers
Or know how to play by your Ocean's
blown billows ?
Who never met you,
Whose sires forget you,
These nations and nations
Who never saw sea nor the riverside
willows.

The Mother.

I wait ; I have patience.

The Spirit of the Age.

Old Silence, wait ; old Sleeper, use
your patience.
You are dead and forgotten

" The Mother "

As a corpse that was rotten
A twelvemonth and more ;
As dead as the Empires of yore,
As dead and forgotten.

The Little Blades of Grass (whispering).

Listen, listen.

The Little Grains of Sand (whispering).

Ah, we hear ; you'll see us glisten
When the Wind shall set us whirling.

The Spirit of the Age.

I am here and I shall stay
To the utter, utter day ;
Tell me, you who've lived for ever,
Saw you ever such a fever,
Such a madness of gold-getting,
Such forgetting
Of the Thing that you called Truth—
Such contempt, such lack of ruth,
For your leisure and your dalliance,
As since Time and I joined alliance ?
I shall rule and falter never,
You are dead and gone for ever.
(*He pauses. THE MOTHER says nothing.*)

The Little Blades of Grass (whispering).

Are you there, O all ye others ?

The Little Grains of Sand.

We are here, O little brothers.

" The Mother "

The Spirit of the Age.

Old Silence, speak !
I had not thought to find you half so weak
In argument. Acknowledge I am he
That ever more shall be.
Be just ; confess that I have won
And that your race is run.

[She still keeps silence. He goes on, excitedly.]

D'you think that I am frightened by your
fools
Who with their rules
And rusty saws from musty stools
In dusty schools,
Squeak. " In the very nature of the case,
Unless the sequence of the immobile earth
Shall change, the sun and tides stand still
and all
The vast phenomena of peoples, kings,
And mighty Empires be for you reversed,
That day must come when your world-
sway declines " ?

The Little Blades of Grass.

Hearken, hearken :
Brothers, are ye there ?

The Little Grains of Sand.

Brothers, when that wind blows we shall
darken
All the air.

"The Mother"

The Spirit of the Age.

I heard another fool with : "Time shall
come
When the tired human brain,
That now already reels,
Shall utterly refuse to face again
The turmoil and the hum
Of all these wheels and wheels and wheels
and wheels and wheels,
This clattering of feet
And hurrying no-whither ; deem it sweet
To lie among the grasses,
Where no more shadow is than of the cloud
that passes
Beneath the sun." Another squeaked of
strife ;
Of cataclysms, plagues ; and slackening
grip on life,
And pictured for us street on street on
street
Re-echoing to the feet
Of one sole, panic-stricken passenger ;
Pictured my houses roofless to the air,
The windows glassless, doors with ruined
locks,
The owlet and the fox
Sole harbourers there ;
The only sounds hawks' screaming, plover's
shriek
Above the misted swamps ; the rivers burst
Their banks and sweep, athirst,

“ The Mother ”

My rotting City. . . . Horrid ! . . . Mother
speak ;
Speak, mother, speak, who are so old and
wise.

The Little Blades of Grass (tittering).

Ho, ho ! ho, ho !
The braggart groweth tremulous.

The Little Grains of Sand and of Dust.

Hallo ! hallo—o—o !
He is afraid of us.

The Spirit of the Age.

D'you think that I am frightened by these
lies ?
Old Dotard, I . . .
I rule ; am come to stay
For ever and a day.
Behold,
Where all my million lieges toil for grime
and gold.

[*The fog lifts sudaenly. Against a
shaft of pale, golden sky, one sees
the immense City like a watery-
edged silhouette. A great central
dome, the outlines wet and gilded
by the rays of light ; warehouses
like black iron cliffs, square along
a river ; black barges, with pale
lights at the bows, creeping down
the glassy yellow water ; forests of
chimney stacks and of masts of
shipping.*

[REDACTED]

“ *The Mother* ”

Answer, old witch ; old silent envier of my
joy,
I challenge you, old Hecate.

The Mother (very softly).

Where is Troy ?

The Spirit of the Age.

What's Troy compared to me ?

The Mother.

Where Carthage, Nineve,
Where Greece, where Egypt, where are all
that host
Whose very names are lost ?

The Little Blades of Grass (whispering).

When we crave them,
Then we have them.

The Little Grains of Sand and of Dust.

When the winds blow we o'er-ride them,
And we hide them
Silently.

The Spirit of the Age.

What were they all—all of them measured
by me ?
For never among the Nations
And never between the Oceans,
Were known such emanations

" The Mother "

Of tense, strung-nerved emotions,
Such strivings,
Never such hivings
Of humans . . .

The Mother.

Son, those cities of the plain and of the
shore !
My winds blew and their fleets were
shattered,
My waves raged their harbours a-choke ;
A very little their strivings mattered,
Little their tenseness ; their hivings broke
For evermore.

Little one, I who am young, furnished them
graves and I sung
Dirges above them. You have your
millions,
Men of all nations, I have my billions and
billions and billions,
Of those who are stronger than men ;
whose persistence,
Whose creeping on sods, and flight down
the winds evades the last watch, over-
powers the hopeless resistance.

The Little Blades of Grass.

Hearken, hearken :
Brothers, are ye there ?

The Little Grains of Sand and of Dust.
Brothers, when that wind blows we shall
darken
All the air.

"The Mother"

The Mother.

Son : when I turn in my slumber,
Your cities withouten number
Shall fall. . . . There shall remain upon
the ground
Rubble and rubbish ; a rising and settling
of dust all around,
Here and there a mound. . . .

And the grass will come a-creeping,
And the sands come sifting, sweeping,
Down the winds and up the current,
Dry and dead and curst, abhorrent.
Grass for the cities of the plains and of the
hills ; sand and bitter dust for the cities
of the shore.

Little one, I who am old, hid all those
strivings of yore,
Little one, I old and grey,
Bid you play,
Wrestle and worry and play in the folds of
my dress,
Till you tire, and the fire of your passions
fails in your earth-weariness.
Little one, I who am kind, give you time
till you tire of your play,
Time till you weary and say :
" Hold ; enough of our making-believe.
Ah, children, leave striving and leave
The little small things that we deemed
Above price ; all the playthings that seemed
Worth a world of contriving and strife."

" The Mother "

When the glimmer of gold loses life
And its weight groweth deader and deader,
And no one shall crave to be leader,
O'ermasterer, lord of the knife.

Little one, I who am wise, bid you go back
to your play,
Play the swift game thro' the day.
When even comes you shall kneel down
and pray,
And, well-content, at last lay down your
head
Upon my ultimate bed
And lose the tenseness of your futile quest
In me who offer rest.

*(The fog sweeps down: the city disappears.
The Spirit of the Age says in a low voice.)*

Poor wand'ring proser,
Poor worn-out, mutt'ring dozer,
With your old saws
Of sempiternal laws,
The day's to me not you . . .
Strike down the old ; cry onwards to the
new.

*[A train rumbles slowly past, going
cautiously through the yellow fog.]*

The Little Blades of Grass (whispering).

Hearken, hearken :
Brothers, are ye there ?

" The Mother "

The Little Grains of Sand and of Dust
(whispering back).

Brothers, when that wind blows we shall
darken
All the air.

CURTAIN

Wisdom

THE young girl questions : "Whether were
it better
To lie for ever, a warm slug-a-bed
Or to rise up and bide by Fate and Chance,
The rawness of the morning,
The gibing and the scorning
Of the stern Teacher of my ignorance?"
"I know not," Wisdom said.

The young girl questions : "Friend, shall I
die calmer,
If I've lain for ever, sheets above the
head,
Warm in a dream, or rise to take the
worst
Of peril in the highways
Of straying in the by-ways,
Of hunger for the truth, of drought and
thirst?"
"We do not know," he said,
"Nor may till we be dead."

The Posy-Ring

(AFTER CLEMENT MAROT)

**THIS on thy posy-ring I've writ :
"True Love and Faith "
For, failing love, Faith droops her head,
And lacking faith, why Love is dead
And's but a wraith.
But Death is stingless where they've lit
And stayed, whose names hereon I've writ.**

To Christina at Nightfall

LITTLE thing, ah, little mouse,
Creeping through the twilit house,
To watch within the shadow of my chair
With large blue eyes ; the firelight on your
hair
Doth glimmer gold and faint,
And on your woollen gown
That folds a-down
From steadfast little face to square-set feet.
Ah, sweet ! ah, little one ! so like a carven
saint,
With your unflinching eyes, unflinching
face,
Like a small angel, carved in a high place,
Watching unmoved across a gabled town ;
When I am weak and old,
And lose my grip, and crave my small
reward
Of tolerance and tenderness and ruth,
The children of your dawning day shall
hold
The reins we drop and wield the judge's
sword
And your swift feet shall tread upon my
heels,

To Christina

And I be Ancient Error, you New Truth,
And I be crushed by your advancing
wheels . . .

Good-night ! The fire is burning low,
Put out the lamp ;
Lay down the weary little head
Upon the small white bed.
Up from the sea the night winds blow
Across the hill, across the marsh ;
Chill and harsh, harsh and damp,
The night winds blow.

But, while the slow hours go,
I, who must fall before you, late shall wait
and keep
Watch and ward,
Vigil and guard,
Where you sleep.
Ah, sweet ! do you the like where I lie
dead.

Wife to Husband

If I went past you down this hill,
And you had never seen my face before,
Would all your being feel the sudden thrill
You said it felt, once more?

If I went past you through this shaw,
Would you be all a-quiver at the brush
Of my trailed garments ; would the sudden
hush

You said the black-birds' voices had in awe
Of my first coming, fall upon the place
Once more, if you had never seen my face
Nor ever heard my passing by before,
And nought had passed of all that was of
yore?

Two Frescoes

It occurred to me that a series of frescoes might arise dealing with the fortunes of Roderick the Goth. Having neither wall nor brushes I have tried to put two of them upon paper.

I

THE TOWER

DOWN there where Europe's arms
Stretch out to Africa,
Throughout the storms, throughout the
calms
Of centuries it took the alms
Of sun and rain ; the loud alarms
Of war left it unmoved ; and grey
And brooding there it watched the strip of
foam
And fret of ruffled waters, was the home
Of the blue rock-dove and the birds o'
the main.

Coming from Africa
The swallows rested on it flying north
In spring-time ; rested there again,
When the days shorten, speeding on the
way
Homewards to Africa.

Two Frescoes

Back and forth
The tiny ships below sped ; east and west
It was called blest
By mariners it guided. Mystery
Hung round it like a veil. The ancient
Ones,
They said, had seen it rise
Upwards to the old suns,
Upwards to the old skies,
When Hercules
Did bid it guard those seas.

It was a thing of the Past ;
Stood there untroubled ; like a virgin,
dreamed ;
And not a man of all that land but deemed
The tower sacred.
It was a symbol of an ancient faith,
Some half-forgotten righteousness, some
Truth,
Some virtue in the land whose tillers said :
"Whilst that stands unenforced, it is well."
Be sure the thing is even so to-day,
Our tower doth somewhere unenforced rise
Upwards to our old skies.
And if we suffer sacrilegious hands
To force its innocence, our knell shall ring
As it rang out for them on that old day
Knolling from Africa.
You say it was the King who did this thing,
Who sinned against this righteousness.
But say :
If we stand by and with averted eyes,

Two Frescoes

Or, shrugging shoulders, let our rulers sin
Against the very virtue of the race,
Who is it then but us must bear the pains
Of Nemesis? Ah, yes, it was the King. . . .

Two Frescoes

II

GOTHS

"LET the stars flame by as the flaming
earth falls down,
Ruined fall the earth as the clanging
heavens fall.
Clasp me, love of mine ; be the jewels in
my crown
But the firelit tears of Gods, of the
Ancient Ones of all."

The swart King paced his palace wall
And down below the maids at ball
Sang in choir at evenfall
As they played :

"Make our couch of Greece and the foot-
stool for our throne
Of Rome, throw scented Spain for the
incense of our fire,
Bring me all the East for the jewels in my
zone
Cast them all together for our leaping
wedding pyre."

And he looked down
Into their cloistral shade
And saw, without the tongues of
shadow thrown
By wall and tree of that sequestered place
One girl who had the sunlight on her
face,
Who swayed and clapped her hands
and sang alone.

Two Frescoes

"My father can but die," she sang,
"My mother can but weep,
This weary town fall blazing down
And be a smouldering heap
Beneath the flame
Where I was wont to keep
My weary vigil till my lover came."

Chanting in her pauses all the girls within
the close
Sang to her singing, and their hidden
chorus rose
Like a wave, fell like falling asleep.
And for the King, her voice like fiery
wine
Set all his pulses throbbing and her face
Did dazzle more than did the blood-red
sun.

"He who would win me, let him woo
like this,
Flames on his face and the blood upon
his hands,
Ravish me away when the blackening
embers hiss
As the red flesh weeps to the brands."

That King was one who reigned there
alone
Upon those very confines of the world,
Where conquering races ebb to sloth and
sink
As still great rivers sink into the sands.

Two Frescoes

And—for his fathers had been rav'ning
wolves

Who coursed through ruin, pestilence and
death

When all the world flamed red from end to
end—

That ancient song of his destroying race

The girl sang stirred the fibres of his frame

Till all the earth was red before his face.

It had been so the women sang of old

To his forgotten sires, and still they sang

Within the shadow of his palace wall,

The cloister of his grimmest liege of all.

And as she sang the ferment worked in her

And shook her virgin's voice to jarring
notes.

Stirring in her the ancient cry of
throats

Torn with the passions of the ancient
days.

“Pour me blood o' gods ; bring me broken
oaths for toys

Countless of the cost, of their ruin, of thine
own ;

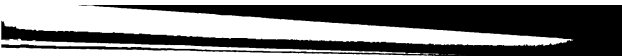
Drunk with wine and passion, drink thy
moment's fill of joys,

Godlike, beastlike, manlike, drink and cast
thy cup a-down ;

Lose thy life ; give thy crown,

Lose thy soul, give thine all,

As we sink to death and ruin with the
smoke o' worlds for pall.”



Two Frescoes

And so she raised her eyes and saw the King
Stand frowning down, his face inspired with
flame

Fro' the west'ring sun. And then the
Angelus

Chimed out across the silent land of Spain.
Beyond the strip of foam the imaums called,
And Africa and Europe fell to prayer.

But those two gazing in each other's eyes
Looked back into the hollows of the years.
And as he stood above his brooding land
It was as if she saw her sires again.

Flames shone upon his face and on his
hands

Incarnadined ; whenas the sun sank down
He raised his eyes and seemed to see that
Spain

Was all on fire with blood upon the roofs.
And down to South the inviolate, pallid
tower

Rose silent, pointing to the crescent moon
And that great peering planet called Sohél,
That heralds, as Mahomet's doctors say,
His domination and his children's sway,
Rose over Africa.

Volkswaise

A POOR girl sat by a tower of the sea
All a-wringing of her hands ; " Will he never
show," says she,
" Just a token, just a glimmer of his ship's
lant . . . horn ? "

" Oh, all ye little grains of sand
Twist into a rope shall draw his keel
Hither. Oh, ye little gulls and terns,
Join wings and bear me from this strand
To where I'll feel
His arms, and find where on the foam his
ship is borne."

A poor girl sat, etc.

" Oh, all ye little stars o' the night
Come down and cluster in my hair ;
Oh, bright night-flashes o' the waves
Shine round me till I'm all one flame of light.
So, far at sea,
He'll deem a beacon beckons him to
me. . . ."

*A poor girl sat nigh a tower of the sea
All a-wringing of her hands ; " Will he
never show," said she,
" Just a token, just a glimmer of his ship's
lant . . . horn ? "*

And Afterwards

(A SAVAGE SORT OF SONG ON THE ROAD)

*"Once I was a gallant and bold I
And you so tender and true,
But I'll never again be the old I
Nor you the old you."*

I shall go lounging along on the edge
Of the grass. . . . You'll loiter along by
the hedge.

I shall go dogged through dust and the dirt
Like an ass in my moods.

You with a new sweetheart at your skirt
Ev'ry few roods. . . .

"Once I was a gallant," etc.

We'll maybe jog along together
A long way ;
Maybe put up with the weather together,
Better or worse
As it chances day by day,
Or maybe part with a kick and a curse
I and you,
After a turning or two. . . .

"But I'll never again," etc.

On a Marsh Road

(WINTER NIGHTFALL)

A BLUFF of cliff, purple against the south,
And nigh one shoulder-top an orange pane.
This wet, clean road ; clear twilight held in
the pools,
And ragged thorns, ghost reeds and dim,
dead willows.

Past all the windings of these grey, forgotten
valleys,
To west, past clouds that close on one dim
rift—
The golden plains ; the infinite, glimpsing
distances,
The eternal silences ; dim lands of peace.

Infinite plains to know no wanderer's foot ;
infinite distances where alone is rest ;
All-virgin downs where none shall pasture
sheep ; inviolable peaks that none shall
climb,
From whose summit nor you nor I shall gaze
on oceans infinite beyond,
Nor none look back upon this world folding
to-night, to rain and to sleep.

Perseverance D'Amour

A LITTLE PLAY

Time.—Thirteenth Century.

Place.—In and near the City of Paris.

Persons—

ANSEAU DIT LE TOURANGEAU,
Jeweller to the King.

TIENNETTE, daughter of a bondman
of the Abbey of Saint Germain.

THE ABBOT OF SAINT GERMAIN,
HUGON DE SENNECTERRE.

THE KING OF FRANCE.

THE QUEEN OF FRANCE.

THE KING'S CHAMBERLAIN.

A FAT BURGESS OF PARIS.

A THIN ONE.

A STRANGER.

Monks of the Abbey ; a Crowd, etc.,
etc.

Perseverance D'Amour

Ans. Ah, sweetheart, is your state so
poor a one
That, on a Sabbath, in despite of law
You come abroad to work. Have you no
fear?

Tien. My lord, I have no fear; I am
below
The notice of the laws and the Lord Abbot
Doth give us licence thus to graze our cow
After the hour of vespers.

Ans. Well, my dear,
You set the welfare of your soulless beast
Above the welfare of your little soul?

Tien. Our little souls, my lord? Our
soulless beast
Is more than half our lives and more than
all
The little souls that we have never seen.

Ans. Why, then, you're passing poor. And
yet you have
Your jewels and the gold you carry with
you.
Your eyes and hair; I would I had such
gold.
Where are your lovers? You are near a
city
Where what you have . . .

Tien. Nenny, my lord, I have . . .

*[She holds out her left arm and shows
him, on it, a silver band such as is
worn by grazing cattle, but without
the bell. ANSEAU raises his hands
in horror.]*

Perseverance D'Amour

Ans. A chattel of the Abbey's

Tien. Ah, my lord,
I'm daughter to the Abbey's serf Etienne.
Who marries me becomes—it makes no
boot
Though he be even burgess or more
great—

Becomes a bonded serf with me and falls
Body and goods to the Abbey. If he love
Withouten wedlock, then the children fall
Again to the Abbey. . . . Were I ten times
less

Ill-favoured than I am, the most in love
Would flee me like the plague.

Ans. And do you say
That not a one, for love of your blue eyes
And of your mouth and of your little hands,
Did ever try to buy your liberty,
As I bought mine o' the King?

Tien. It costs too dear.
It costs too dear, my lord. All those I
please
At meeting go away as they did come.
It costs too dear.

Ans. And have you never thought
Of seeking other lands on a good horse
Behind a rider. . . .

Tien. Oh, one thinks . . . one thinks . . .
But, sir, the Abbey's arms are very long.
They'd hang me if they caught me, and the
man,

If he were noble, he must lose his lands ;
If simple, life and all. I am not worth

Perseverance D'Amour

Such stakes. Besides, I live in fear of
God

Who set me where I am.

*[She begins to drag the cow further
along the road. ANSEAU stands
silent. At last he says absent-
mindedly :*

Ans. But then—your age?

Tien. I do not know, my lord, but the
Lord Abbot,

They say, doth keep account. . . .

Ans. And what's your name?

Tien. I have no name, my lord, my
father was

Baptiz'd Etienne, and so my mother was
"The woman called Etienne," and as for
me

They call me Tiennette, but I've no name.

Ans. (in the same tone). Your cow, now,
is a noble beast.

Tien. My lord,

Her milk's the best of all the country side.
If you do thirst

Ans. Why, no, I have no thirst
That that could satisfy. Now listen you. . . .
I am that Anseau called le Tourangeau,
My fame is what it is, my work no worse.
After my light I've lived and done my best,
And I am wealthy past the middle wealth.
I never followed women ; ev'ry night
Your gallants passed my windows they have
seen

Perseverance D'Amour

My steadfast lamp behind the iron grilles,
Have seen me bent above the shining gold
Or black against my forge. I once was
poor,

Now I am wealthy past the middle wealth.
I am a man like other men, not worse
And little better, not I think unkind
Nor too much given to mirth. And so I've
lived

Since I could wield a chisel of mine own.
But now—I cannot tell you when or how,
What set me thinking, how the thought
increased—

I could not sleep at night, nor brace to
work.

It may have been a month ; I do not know.
Till, of a sudden, as small bubbles run
To merge into one whole, the thought was
there ;

I must be married, I must have some soul
To share my joys with and to share my
griefs,

And bear me little children. . . . Ever since
That thought has been all me. I was to-
day

Before the altar of Saint Eloy's church
(The seven small gold saints and the large
cross

Set with carbuncles are my proper work),
And prayed that he would set within my
path

A woman fitted for my prime of life.
You see me ; this is I. The air's so hot

Perseverance D'Amour

Within the narrow streets I came out here
Where I have never walked this seven
years.

The little birds were singing down the sun
The bell rang out and in the sacred minutes
I saw you stand against me ; was it not
An answer from the Saint ?

Tien.

Alas, if but

The price were not so great.

Ans.

I've little skill

In women, but there is a certain sound
Comes from true metal ; I've a skill in that,
And when I look at you and when you speak
I seem to hear that sound.

Tien.

If but the price

Were not so great. I am not worth the tenth.
You do not know. . . . I've little skill in
men.

You frighten me a little ; what know I ?

If there is any truth for such as I

You seem to have that truth. If any
goodness

Is in the world for me, it seems in you.

You should be strong and gentle, I am weak.

I do not know; I say I do not know.

Alas, alas . . .

*[She begins to weep softly. ANSEAU
crosses himself, joins his hands and
says :*

Ans. I make a vow to my Lord Saint Eloy,
under whose invocation are all master
jewellers, to invent two shrines of gilded
silver of the finest work it shall be granted

Perseverance D'Amour

to me to achieve. I make a vow to fill them, the one with a likeness of the Holy Virgin, to the end that if I achieve the liberty of my wife, she be glorified; the other for my patron Saint Eloy if only I have success in this my emprise. And I swear by my eternal salvation to persevere with courage in this affair, to spend in it all that I possess and to quit of it only with my life. So God help me, Anseau dit le Tourangeau.

[TIENNETTE *has sunk upon her knees;*
ANSEAU *bends and raises her. The*
cow has moved slowly up the side of
the ditch and is browsing on the
vines.

Tien. Alas, alas . . .
You did not know. You must take back
your vow.

I could love you all my life. Alas, alas . . .

Ans. The vow is said; there is no taking
back.

Tien. You do not know, alas, you do not
know. . . .

[*She runs to the cow as the scene closes.*

END OF SCENE I

Perseverance D'Amour

The pouncet-box was paid for. It was out of the great love the Chamberlain bore our master . . .

The Fat Burgess. Well, be it as you will, neighbour. For love or debt the King's Chamberlain hies him with Maître Anseau to the Abbot. And the crafty Abbot . . .

The Crowd. Pestilence carry off Abbot Hugon . . . May the plague take him off ere he take one of our free burgesses for a serf.

The Fat Burgess. This crafty Abbot will not abate one jot ; but sitteth as mum as a fox in a drain. The Master offereth great fortunes for this wench. But the Abbot will have him for serf if he marry her thinking to gain for the Abbey the incomparable skill of . . .

The Thin Burgess. Neighbour, you mistake. It is a matter of principle.

(To the Stranger). Sir, the thing is thus. This Abbot would enslave all us free burgesses and he makes with our Master a beginning. He hath other wenches for all us burgesses. . . .

The Wife of the Thin Burgess. Oh, the guile, the guile. . . .

The Fat Burgess. Principle or no principle, the matter stands thus. Maître Anseau going again to the Clerk's Meadow finds there no Tiennette. For, sir, our 'prentices having planned to carry her off in spite, these wicked priests did have

Perseverance D'Amour

her clapped up close. Since which time our Master hath been suffered to see her only through a little grille. . . .

The Thin Burgess. See the craft of it. This is to whet his appetite.

The Fat Burgess's Wife. Oh, sir, they say it be pitiful to see them there. They do buss the bars of each side and the tears do run, do run like juice from a roasting capon. A did use to be a lusty man and now A's grown so pale, so pale. . . .

The Fat Burgess. He eats not . . .

The Thin Burgess. Sleeps not.

The Fat Burgess. Does no work . . .

The Thin Burgess. Sighs and groans.

The Fat Burgess. Raves and swears . . .

The Thin Burgess. And the crux of the matter is : to-day he shall make his final choice, whether to have the Tiennette and a serf's life, or leave her and take to . . .

A Loud Voice. The King has gone to the Abbey. . . .

The Crowd. Maître Anseau. Maî . . . tre An . . . seau. . . .

The Thin Burgess. The King, sir, doth owe our Master great sums and shall intercede for him. . . .

The Fat Burgess. I do wager ten yards of white velvet to a bodkin he do leave her go her way and he his.

The Wife of the Thin Burgess. I do wager fourscore and two of my fatting capons he do have her. . . .

Perseverance D'Amour

The Voice again. The King has gone to the Abbey. . . .

The Crowd. Maître Anseau . . . Maître Anseau. . . .

The Fat Burgess. Be it a wager

The Wife of the Thin Burgess. Be it a wager and shake hands upon it. . . .

[A great uproar behind; the crowd sways backwards and forwards, then opens. Maître ANSEAU is seen to be mounting a white jennet from the steps of his house.]

The Crowd. To the Abbey, to the Abbey . . . *(They run off.)*

The Stranger. I shall be killed; I shall be killed. . . . My hat is gone.

END OF SCENE II

Perseverance D'Amour

SCENE III

[*The Great Hall in the Abbey of Saint Germain. To L. very large doors, opened and showing through their arches an apple close, red apples lying in heaps on the turf below whitened tree trunks. Facing the doors the Abbot's chair. Swallows fly in and out among the gilded beams of the tall roof.*

The ABBOT HUGON, Monks, Cross-bearer.
Behind—The Crowd, Soldiers of the Abbey, King's Soldiers ; Afterwards—
Bondsmen of the Abbey.

The ABBOT HUGON, *a very old man. His shaven face, very brown, small and dried, hangs forward on his breast, a richly-jewelled mitre pressing it down. He is seated in his chair facing the open doors. The Monks are round his chair which stands high on stone steps.*

The Crowd is being pressed in place at the back of the hall by the Soldiers of the Abbey, who set their halberd staves across the faces. The King's Soldiers look on laughing. A great uproar. A flourish of trumpets sounds without ; the ABBOT is assisted to his feet and gives the benediction towards the doors.

Enter the KING OF FRANCE. He rides a black stallion into the hall ; the QUEEN in a white litter borne by two white

Perseverance D'Amour

mules. The curtains of the litter and the clothes of the mules are sewn with golden fleur-de-lis, the mules are shod with gold. A train of lords and ladies follow them. The KING'S CHAMBERLAIN comes to stand by the head of the King's horse.

The Crowd. The King . . . the King. Do you see the King ? . . . Now the Queen. Ah . . . h . . . h . . .

[The KING salutes the ABBOT who blesses him again. Their lips can be seen to move, but what they say is lost in the exclamations of the Crowd. . . . The KING bends to speak to his CHAMBERLAIN, who exit. The QUEEN puts her head out of the litter.

The Crowd. The Queen. . . . Do you see the Queen ? . . . Ah . . . h . . . h . . .

[The CHAMBERLAIN returns with ANSEAU DIT LE TOURANGEAU, who kneels in the space between the KING and the ABBOT.

The Crowd (a great cry). Ha, Maître Anseau, Maître Anseau. A free man. No serf . . . no serf. . . .

[It grows silent. The voice of the KING is heard as if continuing a speech.

Perseverance D'Amour

The King. Be of courage, man.
My lord the Abbot will have need of us
Upon a day.

The Crowd. Huzza . . . hear the King
. . . the King. . . .

The King. For, in the end, we are the
King of France.

If what men say be true we are more poor
Than you are. Therefore courage, man,
look up.

Set a high price and with a smiling face
Cast down that price. Lord Abbot, name it
him,

He's stores of gold, they say. Now, Master,
rise.

Stand up, man, and unpouch. Lord Abbot,
name

The lowest ransom.

The Abbot. Sire, the price is fixt.

The Crowd. Strangle that Abbot. Cast
him down to us.

The Abbot. The price is fixt. There is one
only price.

I am the servant of the Abbey's fame,
Glory, renown and ancient heritages.
Our statutes fix the price, I can no more.
We live in troublous times ; the breakers
roar

Against the ship o' the Church; the times
are evil ;

And I a feeble, poor old man who stand
By the grace of God at the helm. What
would you have ?

Perseverance D'Amour

To bate one jot of our enforced rights
Were to cast down into that raging sea
One of the sails we trust to for our voyage
And final harbouring. The price is fixt.

The Crowd. Let us unfix it. Cast him
down to us.

The King. You hear him, Master?

Ans. Oh, I hear him, sire.

The King (to his Chamberlain). You
should be famous to defeat the
laws,

To find out quibbles ; cheat the statutes'
due.

What say you?

The Chamberlain. Sire, I can but what
I can.

The Abbot is too strong ; 'tis manifest
That he who's certain of the whole would
be

Ill skilled at bargaining to take a part.
The Abbot's case is that. And for the
rest :

I've argued with our Master ; I have said :
"Good Master, think, the world is very
large,

And full t'o'erflowing of dames passing
fair."

I've told him that the tenth part of his
goods

Would purchase him the name of noble-
man,

Another tenth a lady to his bed,
The noblest and the fairest in the land.

Perseverance D'Amour

What would you have? The man is made
of iron

And will not bend ; the Abbot will not break,
And I have wasted breath.

The King. Good madam Queen,
Entreat my lord the Abbot for these
lovers.

The Queen. My lord, I've done a many
things for you,
Have broidered copes, have made my ladies
sew

Your altar cloths with pearls. Beseech you
now

Have pity on these lovers.

The Abbot. Oh, fair Queen,
In that I am a man I pity them.
In that I am God's servant I must shut
My eyes, my ears, my heart. Since there
have been

An abbey in this place, and monks and
bondsmen—

As who should say : Through all the mists
of time,

It hath not been decreed that there should
fall

A burges of the city to the Abbey.

If now this precedent should be despised

There would not . . .

The Queen. Oh, a truce to precedent.
What is this wench? A girl who leads a
cow ;

In sackcloth. Doth the honour of the
Abbey

Perseverance D'Amour

Depend on girls in sackcloth?

The Abbot. Oh, fair Queen,
The precedent . . .

The Queen. Depends on girls in
sackcloth !

Good, my lord Abbot, I had thought you
wise,

Old learned Churchmen had had better
wits.

What you? a man of three - and - ninety
years

Who by the very nature of your vows
Are closed out from love . . . to say a
wench

That leads a cow is necessary to
The honour of your Abbey ! . . .

The Abbot. Lady Queen,
I am an old man ; doting I do say :
This wench that leads a cow is necessary
To the honour of our Abbey. . . .

The King. Gentle wife,
You have the Abbot on the hip, but
sweet,

A-meanwhiles our good Master kneels on
thorns.

Lord Abbot, make an end ; produce this
wench,

This Helen that doth rive our world in
twain,

And let our Master make his utter
choice.

[*At a sign from ABBOT HUGON, four-
and-twenty acolytes issue out from*

Perseverance D'Amour

behind the chair. They strew white rose petals upon the steps until it is like a hill of snow. Enter TIENNETTE.

The Crowd. Ah . . . h . . . h . . .

[*TIENNETTE is dressed like a maiden-queen in white, with a white coif sewn with gold, with a girdle of silver filigree, with white gloves embroidered with pearls. The ABBOT HUGON beckons to her to mount the steps to him. She does so.*

The King (to Maître Anseau). Nay, man, hadst needs be wealthier than we

To set a price on her that led your cow.

[*To the Abbot.*] If you will do us favour in this thing

We shall requite you. We are France and Paris. . . .

The Crowd. Paris and France ! . . .

The King. And France and Paris have been touchéd home

By fortunes of these lovers. . . . Hear us roar ! . . .

The Crowd. Paris and France !

The Abbot. Ah, sire, what would you do ?

You touch yourself by melling in this thing.

If we should blench to this unquiet mob

Perseverance D'Amour

They would gain strength from broken precedent

Which is a dyke against this hungry sea
Wherein a breach being made, the sea
sweeps in

And overwhelms us . . . overwhelms all
France,

The Abbey and the Court. . . .

The Crowd. Paris and France.

The King (to them). Nenny, ye lend the
Abbot similes

That are not pleasant savoured. Master,
speak . . .

[*Maître ANSEAU has risen to his feet
and advances towards the ABBOT
holding out his arms.*

The Queen (to her ladies). She's fair ;
why, yes, I think she's fair to see.
She halts a little. But she's fair, she's
fair.

Ans. Oh, Father Abbot, oh, you man of
God,

If you have any pity in your heart,
If you have any hope of rest to come,
Bethink you, oh, bethink you. It grows late,
You stand upon the very verge of the
shade

Death casts upon us. I do know the law
And I have made a vow. But, man of God,
The thing is in your hands. For me remains
No choice. The verdict lies with you. For
me . . .

Perseverance D'Amour

I have been poor, and I have been a
bondsman,
And I am patient, oh ! and I can bear.
But oh, you man of God, take heed, take
heed.

If you have ever seen a little child,
And if your frozen eyes have thawed to
see

The sunlight on the little children's faces,
Bethink you of the curse you cast upon
The children that that maid shall bear to
me.

I have no choice, I made the vow to God
And I fulfil it. But the little children . . .
Have you the heart to let them live that
life,

Un-named, unknown, to live and die as
beasts

That perish ; all those tender little things
That God doth mean should burgeon in
the light

And with their little laughter sing His
praise.

The Abbot. I am a very ancient man, and
stand

Within the shadow, and I stand and say :
The price is fixt.

Ans. Accursed rat o' the Church,
The price is fixt . . . is fixt. Oh, horrible,
Insensate thirst for gold. Then, oh, thou
man,

Thou spider gorging on the brink of hell,
Suck up my gold, my life. But oh, I keep

Perseverance D'Amour

The better part of me, you cannot touch
The subtle engine God hath pleased to fix
Within my brain, you cannot use the skill
That made me what I am. And that I
swear

Not torture, not the rack, not death itself
Shall set in motion. All your Abbey's rents
For twice a hundred years could never
pay

What it shall lose thereby. I am more
strong

Than iron's hard, and more long-suffering
Than grief is great. For you I might have
been

A fashioner of things divine ; for you
I shall be but a pack-horse.

[TIENNETTE, *who had covered her face
with her arms, stretches out her
arms to ANSEAU.*

Tien. Oh, my love,
My lord, my more than life, thou noble
man,

Forsake me, oh, forsake me, I did say
"You did not know," and, oh you did not
know

When you did make your vow. Forsake
me, then,

And go your ways. . . .

Ans. I cannot go my way ;
I have no way but only this with you.

Tien. There is a way that God hath
shown to me—

Perseverance D'Amour

These last few weeks they have been
schooling me

Within their cloisters—and there is a way,
By which, if you do love me more than all,
You shall enjoy me and go free in the end.
For this the law is—they have told me so—
If I should die before a child is born,
You should go free though losing house
and store,

The occasion of your serfdom being dead.

And oh, my lord and life,
You shall. But for my sin of laying hands
Upon myself, full surely the Lord God
Shall pardon me, full surely the Lord God
Shall pardon who doth know and weigh all
hearts.

[*The ABBOT lays his hand upon her arm.*

The Crowd. You shall not hurt her ; we
will have you down.

Old Spider . . . Rat o' the Church.

The King. Ah, make an end,
Lord Abbot, for our dames have eyes all
wet.

The Abbot. The price is fixt.

Ans. And I must pay the price.

The Crowd. You shall not ; no, you shall
not. We are the free burgesses of Paris.

[*The ABBOT HUGON beckons Maître
ANSEAU to come up to him. He
slowly ascends the steps. The
thurifers draw round, and a cloud
of incense goes up. The Monks*

Perseverance D'Amour

chant and the KING removes his beaver. The QUEEN and her ladies cross themselves.

A great uproar in the hall; the Soldiers of the Abbey are thrown down and the Crowd breaks through; the King's Soldiers force it back. The sound of bells comes in from without. Enter the Bondsmen of the Abbey bearing a canopy. The ABBOT is seen blessing ANSEAU and TIENNETTE. Afterwards they go down the steps together. A Monk beckons them to stand beneath the canopy which has gold staves with little silver bells. During this wedding there has been a constant clamour. Now it falls silent.

The Abbot. Anseau, thou serf and bondsman of our Abbey,
Acknowledge that thy goods and life are ours.

Ans. I do acknowledge it.

The Abbot (to the Bondsmen). Bare ye his arm.

Up to the elbow. Armourer, set thou on This bondsman's wrist the shackle of his state.

[The Armourer rivets a silver collar upon the arm of ANSEAU. Whilst he is doing it the ABBOT descends the steps and comes to them.]

Perseverance D'Amour

The Abbot. My hands are very feeble, I am old.

(*To Tiennette.*) Give me some help, thou wife of the new bondsman.

[*The ABBOT HUGON undoes the collar from the arm of ANSEAU.*

The Crowd. Ah . . . h . . . h . . . What is this? What is this?

The Abbot (to Maître Anseau). Thou art a master jeweller. Hast skill
To break the collar from thy new wife's arm
And not to hurt her?

[*ANSEAU stands as if amazed. The ABBOT frees TIENNETTE.*

Lo, thou burgess's wife,
How is it, to be free?

The Crowd. What? . . . what? . . . what?
What is this? . . . Are they free?

[*As the curtain falls ANSEAU and TIENNETTE stand as if amazed. The monks raise their hands in horror.*

END OF SCENE III.

Perseverance D'Amour

THE AFTER SCENE

[*The chamber of the ABBOT. A bare, small, white-washed room. On the floor, in a broad ray of sunlight that falls from the barred windows, stand two great gilt shrines. The door of the one is closed; through the half-opened doors of the other one sees an image of the Virgin in the likeness of TIENNETTE having a little child upon her arm and a cow kneeling at her feet.*

The ABBOT; Two Religious.

The ABBOT lies with his eyes closed upon a narrow pallet, a black rosary falling from his clasped hands. The Two Religious stand motionless, their heads covered by their cowls, at his feet.

A long silence in which is heard the cooing of a blue pigeon on the window-sill. The ABBOT opens his eyes.

The Abbot. So ye are there; I sent for you.

The end

Is very near me now.

[*He makes a weak gesture with one hand as if pointing to the shrines.*

You see those things?

What say you, brothers, did I dote? I know,

Perseverance D'Amour

I say I know, have known this many
months

What you have whispered in the refectory.
"The Abbot dotes," you said, "The Abbot
dotes" . . .

You said I doted ; that my heart was
touched

By whimperings of lovers. One of you
Shall step into my shoes a short day
hence.

Oh, let your dotage work as well as mine
For honour of the Abbey ; do but once
One-half of what I did in this one thing !
You said I doted, that my heart was
touched.

Nenny, I have a heart, but I am old
And very cunning. I have seen more things
Than most. And I do know my world, I
say.

You would have kept him, you. My heart
was touched,

In happy hour, I say, my heart was
touched,

Mine that has nursed the Abbey's honour
here

As mothers nurse their babes. You would
have held

The letter of the law and raised a storm
That had cast down our house. . . . The
burgesses

Do love us now ; this twelvemonth they
have brought

More offerings than in a lustre past.

Perseverance D'Amour

You would have kept the law and raised a
storm

That must have shorn us of one-half the
rights

We have upon the city. I did know

That, in the acclamations of my mercy

The collar I have set upon their necks

Would gall no withers, yet the precedent

Be riveted. And there is more than this

I gained whose heart was touched by
lovers' tears.

It brought us these two shrines. I tell you,
men,

I prophesy, who lie at the point of death,

That when all precedents are swept away,

And you and I and all of us become

A little dust that would not fill a cup,

These shrines shall be the glory of the

Abbey,

Its chiefest profit and most high renown.

For men shall marvel at the handiwork,

And women tell the story at their work,

And crossed lovers come from all the lands

To make their offerings and shed salt tears

Unto the saints that let their hearts be
moved

By these two lovers of the time before.

I prophesy,

Upon the point of death, I know my world,

I have been in it for a mort of years. . . .

And one of you shall step into my shoes.

You stand there thinking it; I know my
world.

Perseverance D'Amour

[He closes his eyes, then opens them and looks at the image of the Virgin.

Oh, blessed child upon thy mother's arm,
Remember when our Brotherhood is
tried. . . .

(To the Religious). Go, get ye to your
whisperings again
And say I doted. . . .

Brothers, go with God.
Send me a little wine and let me sleep.

[He closes his eyes again. Exeunt the Religious. The blue pigeon flies from the window-sill. Its wings clatter in the stillness.

An End Piece

CLOSE the book and say good-bye to every-
thing ;

Pass up from the shore and pass by byre
and stall,

—For the smacks shall sail home on the
tail of the tides,

And the kine still stand deep in the sweet
water sides,

And they still shall go burying, still wedding
brides,

But I must be gone in the morning.

One more look, and so farewell, sweet
summering,

One moment more and then no more at all,
For the skipper shall summon his hands to
the sea,

And the shepherd still shepherd his sheep
on the lea,

But it's over and done with the man that
was me,

As over the hill comes the morning.

[Of the larger poems in this volume "The Mother" appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*; the shorter ones have all been published in the *Athenaeum*, the *Academy*, the *Outlook* and other weekly journals, or in the *Pall Mall Magazine* and similar monthlies. I have to make the usual acknowledgments to the Editors in question.—F. M. H.]

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